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By BOB VOSSELLER

LACEY - Officials say workers at the Oyster Creek nuclear power plant have safely removed a section of pipe that was leaking water containing tritium.

Nuclear Regulatory Commission spokesman Neil Sheehan said the plant's modifications to the line eliminated the need to shut the plant down to make repairs.

"As such, they were able to halt the leakage and remove a section of the line measuring about 25 feet. That section will now be subjected to lab analysis to determine the cause of the defect," Sheehan said yesterday.

"We have two specialist inspectors on site to assist our two resident inspectors at Oyster Creek in closely monitoring the company's actions and ensuring they are thorough and being safely executed," Sheehan added.

The NRC will continue to engage plant management on the issue and remains in close contact with the state on the situation. The agency has not identified any health and safety concerns for either the public or plant workers as a result of the leakage, all of which remains on site as of this point.

Exelon, the owner of the power plant revised its event notification to the NRC. Sheehan said the change reflects that the tritium concentration in the leakage sampled was "10 million picocuries per liter, not 10 million picocuries per milliliter, and that the leak rate was approximately five gallons per minute. The tritium concentration level is consistent with what would be expected for water taken from the plant's condensate storage tank," Sheehan said.

Rep. John Adler (D-Ocean) stated Thursday that he was concerned over the most recent tritium leak at the power plant. In a release he urged officials at Oyster Creek to stop the leak, provide an update to its cause, and report on what steps are being taken.

"It's frustrating that for the second time in less than six months, a tritium leak has occurred on site at Oyster Creek," Adler said. Adler also said that he is working with congressional colleagues on ways to provide an independent and thorough evaluation of nuclear power plants, including Oyster Creek's piping system.

The plant noted a tritium leak within two pipelines on April 15. Both pipes have since been replaced.

Brick resident, Janet Tauro, who is a member of one of six environmental groups which formed a coalition opposing the relicensing of the power plant said yesterday that "the recent tritium leaks prove that the public cannot have any kind of assurance that this cannot happen again."

Exelon was asked by the NRC to release a proprietary version of the root cause analysis from

the tritium leaks that occurred in April.

"They have pledged release of a detailed study. That just isn't good enough. It's fine to tell the public what happened. But, we need to know why it happened," she added.

"The tritium is contained on site now, but in the coming months, the tritium will travel off site and the flow from that area empties into Barnegat Bay," Tauro said.

The power plant remains at 50 percent of energy producing capacity while repair efforts continue.